

2nd Addendum to the Alternative Report on Canada's Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Submitted by



**CHILDREN
FIRST
CANADA**

**LES ENFANTS
D'ABORD
CANADA**

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Children First Canada has a mandate to be a strong, effective and independent voice for the 8 million kids living in Canada. We have a bold and ambitious vision that together we can make Canada the best place in the world for kids to grow up.©

There have been several major developments since our last submission in June 2020 which we wish to report on, including developments on the legal protection of children's rights, as well as a worsening of children's physical and mental health due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Legislative Efforts to Protect Children's Rights

We previously reported that there were two Bills submitted in the Senate that would further the rights of children in Canada, namely:

[An Act to Establish a Commissioner for Children and Youth in Canada](#). In August, our Young Canadians' Parliament had the opportunity to meet with Senator Rosemary Moodie who tabled the Bill, and to express their support for the Children's Commissioner.

[An Act to Amend the Canada Elections Act and the Regulation Adapting the Canada Elections Act for the Purposes of a Referendum \(to lower the voting age to 16\)](#)



Throughout May – July 2020, Children First Canada hosted consultations with children and youth through virtual forums and an online survey regarding lowering the voting age in Canada. Nearly 200 children and youth participated, and 70 percent support lowering the voting age. The full results of the youth consultation are available [here](#).

In August 2020, the Parliament was prorogued and all legislation died on the books. Parliament has since resumed and both bills were reintroduced on Thursday October 1. Given that we are currently in a minority government and a subsequent federal election is likely in 2021, it is critical that the government act without delay and pass these two Bills.

We have urged the Prime Minister and members of Cabinet to make it a priority to pass both Acts and to include these matters in the mandate letters of the new Cabinet ministers, given the immediate and long-term implications to improve the protection of children's rights in Canada, and we have urged the Prime Minister's Office

Mitigating the Impact of COVID-19 on Children

As we noted in our prior submission, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a hugely detrimental impact on the physical and mental health of children. Many of the concerns that we highlighted to the Committee in June are now clearly evident in national and regional data.

On September 1, 2020, Children First Canada released [Raising Canada 2020](#), the third in an annual series of reports that track the top 10 threats to childhood.

This year, the report highlights the unprecedented impact of COVID-19 on children and their families. The statistics are particularly alarming

- One-third of children in Canada do not enjoy a safe and healthy childhood,
- one in three Canadians report experiencing abuse before the age of 15,
- one in five children live in poverty,
- and perhaps most startling, suicide is now the leading cause of death for children aged 10 to 14.

The report also revealed that the top 10 threats to children are worsening or at risk of worsening as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and that children's rights to life, survival and development are in jeopardy.

The national lockdown put millions of children at risk. For 6 months, kids were cut off from breakfast and lunch programs at school, they experienced increased violence in their homes and had no safe place to go, more children and their families experienced homelessness, we saw a steep decline in children receiving their routine vaccinations, children's physical activity steeply declined, their mental health took a turn for the worse.

The pandemic also worsened the inequities experienced by Black children. First Nations, Metis and Inuit children. And other racialized children and their families. Raising Canada 2020 named systemic racism and discrimination as one of the top 10 threats because of the injustices that Black, Indigenous and other people of colour experience in schools, in the health care, child welfare and justice systems, and in all places where they live, work and play.

The top 10 threats are listed in Figure 1, and an infographic with some of the key statistics is included on page 5. The top 10 threats to children were articulated through a child rights framework, and also highlighted that while the pandemic has made children vulnerable, they also have incredible resilience and have right to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

The full report is available here: <https://childrenfirstcanada.org/raising-canada>

As the report was released, Children First Canada convened a high-level meeting between our Council of Champions and the federal Minister of Health, the Hon. Patty Hajdu, to highlight the report's findings and the Call to Action. The Minister acknowledged that we are talking about issues of life and death for a generation of children.

It's not overstating it to say that children's lives are on the line.

The Raising Canada report has been making headlines across the country, and it turned up the volume on the state of childhood in Canada. There were 74 unique media stories that have been reprinted / broadcast 853 times, bringing much needed public attention to these issues.

Days after our report was released, UNICEF announced that Canada has fallen further behind in protecting the well-being of children: we now rank 30th out of 38 affluent nations.

Children First Canada has since held a special session of the Young Canadians' Parliament, in which children and youth had the opportunity to discuss the top 10 threats and bring forward their recommendations to Members of Parliament and the Senate, and we have held two special events with

1: Top 10 Threats to Childhood in Canada (Raising Canada 2020)



a wide array of stakeholders from government, academic, charities/NGOs, children's hospitals and the private sector.

In spite of overwhelming evidence about the threats to children's rights in Canada and the worsening crisis over the past 6 months, and in spite of strong public support for action, there continues to be a lack of recognition by the federal government of the gravity of the problem.

The recent Throne Speech made positive commitments to childcare and acknowledged the impact of the pandemic on women and the economy (the "she-session") but lacked any recognition of the disproportionate toll that crisis has had on children. None of the recommendations that were brought forward to address the top 10 threats to children were acknowledged or addressed.

Recommendations

We therefore reiterate our call for urgent action by the Government of Canada to:

1. Ensure that the **Act to Establish a Commissioner for Children and Youth** in Canada, and the **Act to Amend the Canada Elections Act** and the Regulation Adapting the Canada Elections Act for the Purposes of a Referendum (to lower the voting age to 16) receive full support and are quickly enacted.
2. Put in place a **National Strategy for Children and Youth**, led by the federal government in consultation with the provinces and territories and First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, to urgently tackle the top 10 threats to children's health and wellbeing, and to ensure the full implementation of the Canadian Children's Charter and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
3. Publish a **Children's Budget** so that there is full transparency on the federal expenditures on Canada's children. A children's budget will help ensure that adequate resources are being directed towards the top 10 threats to childhood along with the full implementation of the Canadian Children's Charter and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This must also include acting on the Joint Statement of our Council of Champions, calling for an investment of \$250 million towards the physical and mental health of children, to protect children from violence, and to invest in their resilience.
4. Promote **child rights education, awareness raising and training**, and fulfill the government's duty to ensure that the UN Convention on the Rights is widely known and understood by Canadian society, and in particular by children and youth and those with duties to protect the rights of children.
5. Ensure the **right of children and youth to participate** in decision making, including ensuring that there are mechanisms in place to support their participation in policy making that affects their lives. We call for the government to fully fund the Young Canadians' Parliament for the next 3 years to ensure young people have a platform to be educated on and exercise their rights, increase civic engagement, and gain knowledge in parliamentary process.
6. **Ratify the 3rd Optional Protocol to the UN CRC for the Communications Procedure** and enable children and youth access to international justice when their rights are denied.
7. Convene a **First Ministers Meeting to urgently discuss the wellbeing of children in Canada amidst the COVID-19 emergency and recovery efforts**.
8. Create a **dedicated School Food Fund** to support the health and wellbeing of children, families and communities, stimulating the Canadian economy during the COVID-19 recovery. This is in addition to the \$360 million that the Coalition for Healthy School recommended in their Budget 2020 submission as an initial Year 1 investment towards the establishment of a strong cost-shared, universal National School Food Program.

There are **8 million children in Canada**, and **1/3 of them do not enjoy a safe and healthy childhood.**



1 in 3 Canadians have experienced abuse before their 15th birthday.



1 in 5 children live in poverty.



Suicide is now the **leading cause of death** for children aged 10 to 14.

The impact of COVID-19 on children's health

Violence against children

In Canada, Kids Help Phone has reported an **increase** in specific conversations about **physical, sexual and emotional abuse.**



As kids go back to school, reports of suspected child abuse may increase, since children will be interacting with trusted adults in their schools.

Vaccination rates

Pediatric infectious disease specialists say that **vaccination rates** among children **have dropped** as much as **20%** in parts of Canada...



...ramping up anxieties that the country could face a series of **infectious outbreaks** while still battling COVID-19.

Going to school: big worries

for children aged 10 to 17

MISSING SCHOOL



3 in 10 put the prospect of **missing out on more school** next year at the top of the list.

Worries about **losing class time** this year and next are higher among teenagers (aged 13-17), whose **graduation** or preparation for graduation are affected.



GOING TO SCHOOL ONLINE

75% say they feel they are keeping up.

That doesn't, however, mean that they're enjoying it.

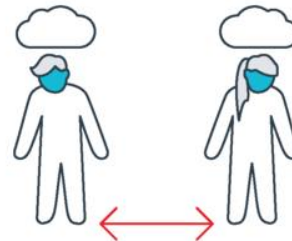


6/10 say that they **dislike it** **6/10** say they feel **unmotivated**

(Angus Reid Survey, 2020)

Mental health

for children aged 15 to 17



Crowdsourced data suggests that **57% of participants** reported their mental health was **"somewhat worse"** or **"much worse"** than it was prior to physical distancing measures during the pandemic.



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